DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 129 384 95 JC 760 546

TITLE The Function of External Evaluation in the AID Program. Advanced Institutional Development Program (AIDP) Two-year College Consortium, Vol. 1, No. 2.

INSTITUTION Advanced Institutional Development Program Two-Year College Consortium.; McManis Associates, Inc., Washington, D.C.; University Associates, Inc., Washington, D.C.

SPONS AGENCY Office of Education (DHEW), Washington, D.C.
PUB DATE [76]
NOTE 9p.

EDRS PRICE MF-$0.83 HC-$1.67 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Community Colleges; *Consultants; *Evaluation Methods; *Junior Colleges; Planning; Program Development; *Program Evaluation
IDENTIFIERS *Advanced Institutional Development Program; *External Evaluation

ABSTRACT

While the values derived from institutional self-evaluation efforts are fairly well understood, external evaluation is an important process in aiding an institution in the achievement of its goals; it supplements and complements, but does not supplant self-evaluation. Common functions of the external evaluation component of the Advanced Institutional Development (AID) Program include: (1) determining the extent to which the college has developed a continuing internal evaluation system, encompassing its total operations and internal constituencies; (2) examining relationships between institutional goals, mission, and AID Program activity objectives; and (3) determination of adequacy of procedures and processes employed for periodic re-examination of goals and mission, effectiveness assessment, communication of evaluation information, and use of evaluation information in planning. It is not a function of external evaluation to render judgements about the quality or substance of the institution's goals or mission or to render opinions on funding or non-funding of specific activities. The external evaluator's qualifications should include: familiarity with the AID Program, AID monitoring and evaluation concepts, forms, and processes; access to varying expertise needed to evaluate outcomes of the institution's activities; and a background in higher education evaluation. (Author/JDS)

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The Function of External Evaluation in the AID Program

AIDP
CONSORTIUM

THE FUNCTION OF EXTERNAL EVALUATION IN THE AID PROGRAM

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The activity which is the subject of this report was supported in whole or in part by the U. S. Office of Education, Department of Health, Education, and Welfare. However, the opinions expressed herein do not necessarily reflect the position or policy of the U. S. Office of Education, and no official endorsement by the U. S. Office of Education should be inferred.

THE FUNCTION OF EXTERNAL EVALUATION IN THE AID PROGRAM

Evaluation tends to produce the most fruitful benefits when those directly involved in the development and implementation of goal-oriented effort are at the same time involved in meaningful fashion in the evaluation of those efforts. It is through this type of involvement that goals and objectives become more clearly understood and more completely internalized; and, as a result, they serve to sustain and direct efforts more effectively and efficiently toward the achievement of desired ends. Thus, as institutions undertake self-improvement, self-evaluation is of especial importance.

The values derived from self-evaluation efforts are fairly well understood. Self-evaluation procedures are used by colleges and universities in preparation for academic accreditation visits, in preparing to launch fund-raising campaigns, in assessing impacts of academic programs and in many other ways. Not always, but quite commonly, self-evaluation projects are pursued on an ad hoc basis without continuity. Periodic checks by an external evaluator may aid in stimulating evaluation on a more continuous basis. There are reasons to believe that reviews conducted by qualified evaluators from outside the institution provide added assurances of objective analysis and a fresh look at levels of performance. One unique element in the AID Program is the suggested provision for an external group of evaluators to advise the chief executive of an institution on a periodic basis concerning progress toward objective attainment and to assess the quality of the internal evaluation process for determining progress of program activities. This report deals with the role and functions of the external evaluation services which may be provided for in the AID Program. The report is intended to assist college and university management in planning for effective utilization of these external evaluation services.

SIGNIFICANCE OF EXTERNAL EVALUATION

Each institution is encouraged to provide for an external evaluation, i.e., an evaluation by persons not employed at the college. External evaluation supplements and complements, but does not supplant institutional self-evaluation. It is through a combination of appraisal and evidence based on hard data regarding performance outcomes that outside objective reviewers of the AID Program can assess progress of a program and its impact on an institution. External evaluators can bring to the institution a broadened perspective based on their knowledge of higher education institutions in general and of specialized programs in particular. They also bring perceptions free from the emotional attachments and vested interests of persons who are close to the academic and/or administrative programs.

External evaluation is periodic and provides a snapshot of the status of conditions at discrete points in time. To be of greatest value, periodic external evaluation must be an integral part of a continuous, ongoing evaluation effort maintained by the institution. It should provide reliable information as to the effectiveness of activities designed to achieve specific objectives and to accomplish goals that are consonant with the institution's mission. While adequate internal formative evaluation can generate the same information, external evaluation provides an objective validity check of a summative character periodically and may provide guidance relating to the adequacy of the former. It is through a series of clear and accurate snapshots that progress or lack of it can be tracked.

An important role of the external evaluator is to assess the institution's internal evaluation system, determine the degree to which an evaluation system exists by examining its structure and form, the processes and procedures utilized, and the nature and flow of information from the activity and program levels to higher levels of management and to the governing board. A logical extension of the external evaluator's responsibility is to act in an advisory role in developing and implementing improved internal evaluation procedures. This also includes examining the processes and procedures by which information from the evaluation system is used for policy formulation, planning, and administration/management purposes by the institution. In this regard, the external evaluation transcends the actions taken in relation to the supported AIDP activities and encompasses effective use of information in overall institutional planning, management, and evaluation.

COMMON FUNCTIONS OF THE AID PROGRAM EXTERNAL EVALUATION

The importance of external evaluation in a national program such as AIDP has been clearly recognized by the U.S. Office of Education. However, the functions to be carried out by external evaluators vary from one institution to another. The variations reflect local conditions such as size of the institution, previous experience of staff and their sophistication in the development and application of evaluative techniques, the nature of funded activities, administrative style, institutional utilization of assisting agencies and capability for collecting and processing information. In adapting or extracting, from the role of external evaluation as it applies to the institution as a whole, that which is applicable in a specialized sense to AID Program activities, all external evaluation efforts should include certain common functions. Some of these common functions will concern the institution as a whole, but others will focus specifically on activities funded under the AID Program. These functions are as follows:

- *Determine the extent to which the institution has developed a continuing internal evaluation system which encompasses its total operation, involving students, faculty, non-professional staff, managers, administrators, and governing bodies.*

- *Examine the relationships between:*

  - *Institutional goals and institutional mission;*

- *Institutional goals and AID Program activity objectives; and*
- *Activity objectives and (1) the nature of specific quantitative and qualitative performance measures designed to determine achievement of each objective, and (2) methods for judging the efficiency and effectiveness with which each activity is being conducted.*

- *Determine the adequacy of procedures and processes employed for:*
  - *Periodic re-examination of institutional mission and goals;*
  - *Assessing effectiveness of AID Program activity accomplishment and institutional goal accomplishment;*
  - *Communicating evaluation information to all levels of institutional operations; and*
  - *Using evaluation information in planning to redefine objectives and to redirect activities if necessary.*

- *Review progress of all funded AID Program activities, including those being implemented with the help of assisting agencies.*
- *Advise the institution regarding ways in which it can strengthen its AID Program and the evaluation process based upon information obtained about it.*
- *Identify problems which may be seen emerging and give assistance as to resolving them if requested to do so.*

Though many functions are common in all external evaluations, the mode of attack, strategies employed, and procedures implemented in the evaluation will vary. In carrying out these functions an examination will be made of the kinds of quantitative and qualitative data being sought for evaluative purposes and provisions for their analysis, interpretation and dissemination. As previously stated, external evaluators perform a wide variety of specific services for individual institutions. In addition, it is within the province of the external evaluators' function to identify weaknesses in the impact measures developed to measure change attributable to AIDP-funded activities and in methods for assessing the effectiveness of the Planning, Management and Evaluation (PME) system. If invited to do so, the evaluator may work with staff to overcome these weaknesses.

CONSTRAINTS ON THE EXTERNAL EVALUATION

Two constraints on the external evaluation service are noteworthy. First, it is not a function of the external evaluation service to render judgements about the quality and

substance of the institution's mission, goals, AIDP activities and objectives or to justify or assess quality of general academic or professional programs for compliance with accreditation or state licensure and certification standards.

Secondly, it is not a function of the external evaluation service to render opinions on whether or not an activity should or should not have been funded by USOE. Respect for these constraints is essential to the effectiveness of external evaluation services.

MAJOR THRUSTS OF EXTERNAL EVALUATION

The major thrusts of AIDP external evaluation are to determine the extent to which the institution has accomplished its AIDP objectives and to develop or strengthen the institution's capability to systematically assess progress as a basis for improving program operations and for further planning. Given these thrusts, the methods and strategies to be used in the external evaluation process include:

- *Keeping the president apprised of program progress;*
- *Periodic reviews of AIDP progress;*
- *Assistance in the interpretation and use of USOE/AIDP Monitoring and Evaluation "Schedules" where such help is requested; and*
- *Annual (or more often, if desired) written reports on program progress, procedures, and recommendations.*

RECOMMENDED PROCESS

Substantative leadership needed to carry out the functions and to accomplish the above purposes requires that the following factors should be observed:

1. ***Because the external evaluation contractor is employed by the institution and not the Office of Education, the external evaluation contractor reports to the chief executive of the institution and not to USOE.*** Information generated by external evaluation activities is confidential in the sense that the chief executive, through the institution's mechanisms, interprets and distributes information in the report. Too, the external evaluation team members must be cautioned to honor the line of communications. The institution may submit copies in whole or in part or its own summary based on the external evaluation report to USOE or to anyone else, but this decision is left entirely to the college or university administration.

2. ***The number of on-site visits conducted by the external evaluator varies according to the kinds of services agreed upon by the two parties.*** Visits may be more or less frequent, depending upon stages of development. For example, during the first year, more attention may be required in reviewing objectives or performance measures than in subsequent years. The minimum number of on-site visits by the institution's external evaluators should be semi-annually each year of the AIDP grant period. For certain institutions, quarterly site visits may be preferred to ensure continuity and to increase opportunity to provide technical assistance in evaluation procedures. (The frequency of visits should not be so numerous that the external evaluator becomes so intimately involved in project implementation as to jeopardize the hoped-for objectivity.)

3. ***To enhance planning for the evaluation visit, dates for the visits should be set at the beginning of each school year.*** The duration of each site visit will vary based on the agenda and the composition of the external evaluation team. Two days on campus is generally considered a minimum, but it is optional. The scheduling of visits during the year requires consideration so that visits will be in tandem with individual work schedules and minimize the time spent in special preparations. For example, for some institutions the external evaluation visits will be more useful when conducted a week or two prior to meeting some other deadline, such as USOE/AIDP report submissions. For other institutions, the visits will be more helpful if held soon after submitting a USOE/AIDP report.

4. ***The form and frequency of reporting is important to the institution being evaluated.*** As soon as possible following each evaluation visit, the external evaluation contractor should submit a written report to the chief executive on progress of the AID Program with such recommendations as are appropriate.

5. ***The composition of the external evaluation team is an important consideration.*** The number comprising a suitable team cannot be prescribed; however, it is reasonable to expect high quality performance from a team of three or four. Normally the "one-man" team is so limited in breadth that it is difficult to imagine that an institution would be served even at a minimal level.

   To perform effectively, the external evaluator's qualifications should include:

   - *Familiarization with the AID Program, including Planning, Management, and Evaluation (PME) and Transactional Information Systems (TIS) areas;*
   - *Familiarization with AIDP monitoring and evaluation concepts, forms, and process;*
   - *Access to varying expertise needed to evaluate outcomes for each of the institution's AIDP activities, and*
   - *A background of experience and/or education in higher education institutions such that there is knowledge about and understanding of the type of institution for which external evaluation is to be performed.*

In order to avoid conflict of interest or negating the evaluator's effectiveness, he/she should not be involved in carrying out any part of the institution's AID Program either as an assisting agency or an activity area consultant.

In summary, external evaluation is an important process in aiding an institution achieve its goals. To that end, an external evaluator should be chosen with care, for the professional contribution he/she can make to assisting the institution in strengthening academic and administrative areas.

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